

“I’ll try my darnedest to stay healthy:”
The self-care practices of older people
receiving care

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Self-care in later life



- Directing and maintaining health through preventive behaviour and response to illness.
- Seeking help and modifying routines to maintain functional independence.
- Represents capacity to maintain health and well-being; a marker of independence.

Receiving care and practicing self-care

- Self-care continues when people are receiving support from others.
 - People with more chronic conditions and limitations to activities of daily living practice higher levels of self-care.
 - Receiving formal care *does not* impact the level of self-care practiced (Penning, 2002).

Research questions



- *How do older people who are receiving care from others describe their self-care practices?*
- *What meanings do older people attribute to self-care, in the context of broader messages about independence in later life?*

Methods and data

- Interpretive semi-structured interviews with older people using home care in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.
- Recruitment: home care agencies, community groups, flyers and bulletin notices.
- Interviews in participants' homes.
- Interpretive grounded theory analysis.
- Lay understanding of self-care: *What do you to take care of yourself?*



Profile of participants ($n=34$)

Age	65-100, avg. = 81
Gender	26 women, 8 men
Living environment	Owned home (19), rental apts. (4), subsidized seniors' housing (5), assisted living/retirement communities (4)
Living arrangement	Lived alone (21), with family (13)
Home care use	Public (25), private (3), both (5)
Health conditions	Varied (dementia excluded)

The meaning and practice of self-care

- Maintaining *independence*
- Constructing *interdependence*
- Feeling *dependent*



Maintaining independence



- Minimizing reliance on others.
- Staving off current and future dependencies.
- Clear boundaries between independence and dependence.

I do wall push ups and chair sit ups and things like that . . . I eat pretty good. I eat a lot of high fibre foods, like, my cereals, my porridge . . . and **I'll try my darnedest to stay healthy.**

As you get older, you can't help yourself but what can you do? I know, eventually, that I'm going to have to go in a home eventually but I'm going to have to **really, really try to stay out of there and I think this is how you do that** (Donald).

Constructing interdependence

- Support and guidance to engage in personally meaningful self-care practices.
- Interconnectedness in care relationships.
- Autonomy; meaningful choices in the face of care needs.
- Challenging ideals of self-care as an individual responsibility.



For my breakfast, I have rice and a chopped banana in it and almond milk, special milk. Yeah, and so, when they [home care workers] come at noon, I usually have a bowl of soup out for them and make a sandwich . . . no, **I put the ingredients for them to make the sandwich.**

[My daughter] does all my shopping . . . she goes to Costco and they have a most delicious chicken. It's very tasty and she gets me a chicken . . . a whole chicken. Well that makes five meals . . . And the girls [home care workers] will cut it up for me (Carol).

Feeling dependent

- Unmet needs for care.
- Self-care as a struggle in the face of limited support.
- Powerlessness and vulnerability.



Yeah, well if you have to go down to the hospital every day, you want to be clean first. **I want to be clean.** More than one [shower] every two weeks like I've had lately. I'm so tired of sponge bathing I could kill it. But then you've agreed not to have a shower unless there's somebody in the apartment. **I sponge bathe every day but it's still a pain in the behind.** It takes a lot longer (Angela).

Self-care and relations of inequality

- Access to social and financial resources support meaningful self-care practices; with these resources older people can maintain a sense of sense of self-sufficiency and autonomy (independence/interdependence).
- Limited social and financial resources can make it difficult to engage in meaningful self-care practices, in the context of limited access to home and community care (dependence).

Thank you
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